

O Freunde, nicht diese Töne!

September 1914*

The nations are at each other's throats; every day countless men are suffering and dying in terrible battles. In the midst of the sensational news from the front, I have recalled, as sometimes happens, a long-forgotten moment from my boyhood years. I was fourteen. One hot summer day I was sitting in a schoolroom in Stuttgart, taking the famous Swabian state examination. The subject of the essay we were to write was dictated to us: 'What good and what bad aspects of human nature are aroused and developed by war?' What I wrote on the subject was based on no experience of any kind and accordingly the result was dismal; what I then as a boy understood about war, its virtues and burdens, had nothing in common with what I should call by these names today. But in connection with the daily events and that little reminiscence, I have lately thought a good deal about war, and since

* *O Freunde, nicht diese Töne!* (literally, 'O Friends, not these tones!') has immediate associations for the cultivated German. These are the first words of the recitative, sung by the bass soloist, that introduces the choral setting of Schiller's *An die Freude* ('Ode to Joy') in the last movement of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony.

it has now become customary for men of the study and workshop to vent their opinions on the subject, I no longer hesitate to express mine. I am a German, my sympathies and aspirations belong to Germany; nevertheless, what I wish to say relates not to war and politics but to the position and tasks of neutrals. By this I mean not the politically neutral nations but all those who as scientists, teachers, artists, and men of letters are engaged in the labours of peace and of humanity.

We have been struck lately by signs of a ruinous confusion among such neutrals. German patents have been suspended in Russia, German music is boycotted in France, the cultural productions of enemy nations are boycotted in Germany. Many German papers propose to carry no further translation, criticism, or even mention of works by Englishmen, Frenchmen, Russians, and Japanese. This is not a rumour but an actual decision that has already been put into practice.

A lovely Japanese fairy tale, a good French novel, faithfully and lovingly translated by a German before the war started, must now be passed over in silence. A magnificent gift, lovingly offered to our people, is rejected because a few Japanese ships are attacking Tsingtao. And if today I praise the work of an Italian, Turk, or Rumanian, I must be prepared for the possibility that some diplomat or journalist may transform these friendly nations into enemies before my article goes to press.

At the same time we see artists and scholars joining in the outcry against certain belligerent powers. As though today, when the world is on fire, such utterances could be of any value. As though an artist or man of letters, even the best and most famous of us, had any say in matters of war.

Others participate in the great events by carrying the war into their studies and writing bloodthirsty war songs or rabid articles fomenting hatred among nations. That perhaps is the worst of all. The men who are risking their lives every day at the front may be entitled to bitterness, to momentary anger and hatred; the same may be true of active politicians. But we writers, artists, and journalists – can it be our function to make things worse than they are? Is the situation not already ugly and deplorable enough?

Does it help France if all the artists in the world condemn the Germans for endangering a beautiful piece of architecture? Does it do Germany any good to stop reading English and French books? Is anything in the world made better, sounder, righter when a French author vilifies the enemy in the crudest terms and incites ‘his’ army to bestial rage?

All these manifestations, from the unscrupulously invented ‘rumour’ to the inflammatory article, from the boycotting of ‘enemy’ art to the defamation of whole nations, have their source in a failure to think, in a mental laziness that is perfectly pardonable in a soldier at the front but ill becomes a thoughtful writer or artist. From this rebuke I exempt in advance all those who believed even before the war that the world stopped at our borders. I am not speaking of those who regarded all praise of French painting as an outrage and saw red when they heard a word of foreign origin; they are merely continuing to do what they did before. But all those others who were more or less consciously at work on the supranational edifice of human culture and have now suddenly decided to carry the war into the realm of the spirit – what they are doing is wrong and grotesquely unreasonable. They served humanity and believed

in a supranational ideal of humanity as long as no crude reality conflicted with this ideal, as long as humanitarian thought and action seemed convenient and self-evident. But now that these same ideals involve hard work and danger, now that they have become a matter of life and death, they desert the cause and sing the tune that their neighbours want to hear.

These words, it goes without saying, are not directed against patriotic sentiment or love of country. I am the last man to forswear my country at a time like this, nor would it occur to me to deter a soldier from doing his duty. Since shooting is the order of the day, let there be shooting – not, however, for its own sake and not out of hatred for the execrable enemy but with a view to resuming as soon as possible a higher and better type of activity. Each day brings with it the destruction of much that all men of good will among the artists, scholars, travellers, translators, and journalists of all countries have striven for all their lives. This cannot be helped. But it is absurd and wrong that any man who ever, in a lucid hour, believed in the idea of humanity, in international thought, in an artistic beauty cutting across national boundaries, should now, frightened by the monstrous thing that has happened, throw down the banner and relegate what is best in him to the general ruin. Among our writers and men of letters there are, I believe, few if any whose present utterances, spoken or written in the anger of the moment, will be counted among their best work. Nor is there any serious writer who at heart prefers Körner's patriotic songs to the poems of the Goethe who held so conspicuously aloof from the War of Liberation.

Exactly, cry the super-patriots, we have always been suspicious of Goethe, he was never a patriot, he contaminated the

German mind with the benign internationalism which has plagued us so long and appreciably weakened our German consciousness.

That is the crux of the question. Goethe was never wanting as a patriot, though he wrote no national anthems in 1813. But his devotion to humanity meant more to him than his devotion to the German people, which he knew and loved better than anyone else. He was a citizen and patriot in the international world of thought, of inner freedom, of intellectual conscience. In the moments of his best thinking, he saw the histories of nations no longer as separate, independent destinies but as subordinate parts of a total movement.

Perhaps such an attitude will be condemned as an ivory-tower intellectualism that should hold its tongue in a moment of serious danger – and yet it is the spirit in which the best German thinkers and writers have lived. There can be no better time than now to recall this spirit and the imperatives of justice, moderation, decency, and brotherhood it implies. Can we let things come to such a pass that only the bravest of Germans dare prefer a good English book to a bad German one? That the attitude of our military men, who treat an enemy prisoner with consideration, becomes a living reproach to our thinkers, who are no longer willing to respect and esteem the enemy even when he is peaceful and brings benefits? What is to happen after the war, in a period which even now inspires us with some misgiving, when travel and cultural exchange between nations will be at a standstill? And who can be expected to work toward a better state of affairs, toward mutual understanding – who, I say, if not those of us who are sitting here at our desks in the knowledge that our brothers

are standing in the trenches? Honour be to every man who is risking his life amid shot and shell on the battlefield! Upon the rest of us, who love our country and do not despair of the future, it becomes incumbent to preserve an area of peace, to strike bridges, to look for ways, but not to lash out (with our pens!) and still further demolish the foundations of Europe's future.

One more word to those who are filled with despair by this war and believe that because there is a war all culture and humanity are dead. There has always been war, ever since the earliest human destinies known to us, and there was no reason on the eve of this one for the belief that war had been done away with. Such a belief was engendered only by the habit of a prolonged peace. There will be war until the majority of human beings are able to live in the Goethean realm of the human spirit. Wars will be with us for a long time, perhaps forever. Nevertheless, the elimination of war remains our noblest aim and the ultimate consequence of the Western, Christian ethic. A scientist searching for a way to combat a disease will not drop his work because a new epidemic has broken out. Much less will 'peace on earth' and friendship among men ever cease to be our highest ideal. Human culture comes into being through the conversion of animal drives into more spiritual impulses, through the sense of shame, through imagination and knowledge. Though to this day no panegyrist of life has succeeded in escaping death, the conviction that life is worth living is the ultimate content and consolation of all art. Precisely this wretched World War must make us more keenly aware that love is higher than hate, understanding than anger, peace than war. Or what would be the good of it?

To a Cabinet Minister

August 1917

This evening after a hard day's work I asked my wife to play me a Beethoven sonata. With its angelic voices the music recalled me from bustle and worry to the real world, to the one reality which we possess, which gives us joy and torment, the reality in which and for which we live.

Afterwards I read a few lines in the book containing the Sermon on the Mount and the sublime, age-old, and fundamental words: 'Thou shalt not kill!'

But I found no peace, I could neither go to bed nor continue reading. I was filled with anxiety and unrest, and suddenly, Herr Minister, as I was searching my mind for their cause, I remembered a few sentences from one of your speeches that I read a few days ago.

Your speech was well constructed; otherwise, it was not particularly original, significant, or provocative. Reduced to the essentials, it said roughly what government officials have been saying in their speeches for a long time: that, generally speaking, 'we' long for nothing so fervently as peace, as a new understanding among nations and fruitful collaboration in building the future, that we wish neither to enrich ourselves nor to satisfy homicidal lusts – but that the 'time for negotiations' is

not yet at hand and that for the present there is therefore no alternative but to go on bravely waging war. Just about every minister of any of the belligerent nations might have made such a speech, and probably will tomorrow or the day after.

If tonight your speech keeps me awake, although I have read many similar speeches with the same dreary conclusion and slept soundly afterwards, the fault, as I am now certain, lies with Beethoven's sonata and with that ancient book in which I afterwards read, that book which contains the wonderful commandments of Mount Sinai and the luminous words of the Saviour.

Beethoven's music and the words of the Bible told me exactly the same thing; they were water from the same spring, the only spring from which man derives good. And then suddenly, Herr Minister, it came to me that your speech and the speeches of your governing colleagues in both camps do not flow from that spring, that they lack what can make human words important and valuable. They lack love, they lack humanity.

Your speech shows a profound feeling of concern and responsibility for your people, its army, and its honour. But it shows no feeling for mankind. And, to put it bluntly, it implies hundreds of thousands more human sacrifices.

Perhaps you will call my reference to Beethoven sentimentality. I imagine, though, that you feel a certain respect for the Commandments and for the sayings of Jesus – at least in public. But if you believe in a single one of the ideals for which you are waging war, the freedom of nations, freedom of the seas, social progress, or the rights of small countries – if you truly, in your heart of hearts, believe in a single one of these generous ideals, you will have to recognise on rereading

your speech that it does not serve that ideal or any other. It is not the expression and product of a faith, of any awareness of a human need, but, alas, the expression and product of a dilemma. An understandable dilemma, to be sure, for what could be more difficult at the present time than to acknowledge a certain disappointment with the course of the war and to start looking for the shortest way to peace?

But such a dilemma, even if it is shared by ten governments, cannot endure forever. Dilemmas are solved by necessities. One day it will become necessary for you and your enemy colleagues to face up to your dilemma and make decisions that will put an end to it.

The belligerents of both camps have long been disappointed with the course of the war. Regardless of who has won this battle or that battle, regardless of how much territory or how many prisoners have been taken or lost, the result has not been what one expects in a war. There has been no solution, no decision – and none is in sight.

You made your speech in order to hide this great dilemma from yourself and your people, in order to postpone vital decisions (which always call for sacrifices) – and other government officials make their speeches for the same reason. Which is understandable. It is easier for a revolutionary or even for a writer to see the human factor in a political situation and draw the proper inferences than for a responsible statesman. It is easier for one of us because he is under no obligation to feel personally responsible for the deep gloom that comes over a nation when it sees that it has not achieved its war aim and that many thousands of human lives and billions in wealth may well have been sacrificed in vain.

But that is not the only reason why it is harder for you to recognise the dilemma and make decisions that will put an end to the war. Another reason is that you hear too little music and read the Bible and the great authors too little.

You smile. Or perhaps you will say that you as a private citizen feel very close to Beethoven and to all that is noble and beautiful. And maybe you do. But my heartfelt wish is that one of these days, chancing to hear a piece of sublime music, you should suddenly recapture an awareness of those voices that well from a sacred spring. I wish that one of these days in a quiet moment you would read a parable of Jesus, a line of Goethe, or a saying of Lao-tzu.

That moment might be infinitely important to the world. You might find inner liberation. Your eyes and ears might suddenly be opened. For many years, Herr Minister, your eyes and ears have been attuned to theoretical aims rather than reality; they have long been accustomed – necessarily so! – to close themselves to much of what constitutes reality, to disregard it, to deny its existence. Do you know what I mean? Yes, you know. But perhaps the voice of a great poet, the voice of the Bible, the eternal voice of humanity that speaks clearly to us from art, would give you the power of true sight and hearing. What things you would see and hear! Nothing more about the labour shortage and the price of coal, nothing more about tonnages and alliances, loans, troop levies, and all the rest of what you have hitherto regarded as the sole reality. Instead, you would see the earth, our patient old earth, so littered with the dead and dying, so ravaged and shattered, so charred and desecrated. You would see soldiers lying for days in no-man's-land, unable with their mutilated hands to

shoo the flies from their mortal wounds. You would hear the voices of the wounded, the screams of the mad, the accusing plaints of mothers and fathers, sweethearts and sisters, the people's cry of hunger.

If your ears should be opened once more to all these things that you have sedulously avoided hearing for months and years, then perhaps you would reexamine your aims, your ideals and theories, with a new mind and attempt to weigh their true worth against the misery of a single month, a single day, of war.

Oh, if this hour of music, this return to true reality, could somehow come your way! You would hear the voice of mankind, you would shut yourself up in your room and weep. And next day you would go out and do your duty toward mankind. You would sacrifice a few millions or billions in money, a trifling bit of prestige, and a thousand other things (all the things for which you are now prolonging the war), and, if need be, your minister's portfolio with them, and you would do what mankind, in untold fear and torment, is hoping and praying you will do. You would be the first among governing statesmen to condemn this wretched war, the first to tell his fellows what all feel secretly even now: that six months or even one month of war costs more than what anything it can achieve is worth.

If that were to happen, Herr Minister, your name would never be forgotten, your deed would stand higher in the eyes of mankind than the deeds of all those who have ever waged victorious wars.

If the War Goes On Another Two Years

*End of 1917**

Ever since I was a boy I have been in the habit of disappearing now and then, to restore myself by immersion in other worlds. My friends would look for me and after a time write me off as missing. When I finally returned, it always amused me to hear what so-called scientists had to say of my 'absences', or twilight states. Though I did nothing but what was second nature to me and what sooner or later most people will be able to do, those strange beings regarded me as a kind of freak; some thought me possessed; others endowed me with miraculous powers.

So now, once again, I vanished for a time. The present had lost its charm for me after two or three years of war, and I slipped away to breathe different air. I left the plane on which we live and went to live on another plane. I spent some time in remote regions of the past, raced through nations and epochs without finding contentment, observed the usual crucifixions, intrigues, and movements

*'If the War Goes On Another Two Years' was originally published under the pseudonym Emil Sinclair, which Hesse used again when he published *Demian* in 1919.

of progress on earth, and then withdrew for a while into the cosmic.

When I returned, it was 1920. I was disappointed to find the nations still battling one another with the same mindless obstinacy. A few frontiers had shifted; a few choice sites of older, higher cultures had been painstakingly destroyed; but, all in all, little had changed in the outward aspect of the earth.

Great progress had been made toward equality. In Europe at least, so I heard, all countries looked the same; even the difference between belligerent and neutral countries had virtually disappeared. Since the introduction of bombing from free balloons, which automatically dropped their bombs on the civilian population from an altitude of fifty to sixty thousand feet, national boundaries, though as closely guarded as ever, had become rather illusory. The dispersion of these bombs, dropped at random from the sky, was so great that the balloon commands were quite content if their explosive showers had spared their own country – how many landed on neutral or even allied territory had become a matter of indifference.

This was the only real progress the art of warfare had made; here at last the character of this war had found a clear expression. The world was divided into two parties which were trying to destroy each other because they both wanted the same thing, the liberation of the oppressed, the abolition of violence, and the establishment of a lasting peace. On both sides there was strong sentiment against any peace that might not last forever – if eternal peace was not to be had, both parties were resolutely committed to eternal war, and the insouciance with which the military balloons rained their

blessings from prodigious heights on just and unjust alike reflected the inner spirit of this war to perfection. In other respects, however, it was being waged in the old way, with enormous but inadequate resources. The meagre imagination of the military men and technicians had devised a few new instruments of destruction – but the visionary who had invented the automatic bomb-strewer balloon had been the last of his kind; for in the meantime the intellectuals, visionaries, poets, and dreamers had gradually lost interest in the war, and with only soldiers and technicians to count on, the military art made little progress. With marvellous perseverance, the armies stood and lay face to face. Though, what with the shortage of metals, military decorations had long consisted exclusively of paper, no diminution of bravery had anywhere been registered.

I found my house partly destroyed by aerial bombs, but still more or less fit to sleep in. However, it was cold and uncomfortable, the rubble on the floor and the mould on the walls were distressing, and I soon went out for a walk.

A great change had come over the city; there were no shops to be seen and the streets were lifeless. Before long, a man with a tin number pinned to his hat came up to me and asked me what I was doing. I said I was taking a walk. He: Have you got a permit? I didn't understand, an altercation ensued, and he ordered me to follow him to the nearest police station.

We came to a street where all the buildings had white signs bearing the names of offices followed by numbers and letters.

One sign read: 'Unoccupied civilians 2487 B 4'. We went

in. The usual official premises, waiting rooms and corridors smelling of paper, damp clothing, and bureaucracy. After various inquiries I was taken to Room 72 and questioned.

An official looked me over. 'Can't you stand at attention?' he asked me in a stern voice.

'No,' I said.

'Why not?' he asked.

'Because I never learned how,' I said timidly.

'In any case,' he said, 'you were taking a walk without a permit. Do you admit that?'

'Yes,' I said. 'That seems to be true. I didn't know. You see, I'd been ill for quite some time . . .'

He silenced me with a gesture. 'The penalty: you are forbidden to wear shoes for three days. Take off your shoes!'

I took off my shoes.

'Good God, man!' The official was struck with horror. 'Leather shoes! Where did you get them? Are you completely out of your mind?'

'I may not be quite normal mentally, I myself can't judge. I bought the shoes a few years ago.'

'Don't you know that the wearing of leather shoes in any shape or form by civilians is prohibited? – Your shoes are confiscated. And now let's see your identification papers!'

Merciful heavens, I had none!

'Incredible!' the official moaned. 'Haven't seen anything like it in over a year!' He called in a policeman. 'Take this man to Office 19, Room 8!'

I was driven barefoot through several streets. We went into another official building, passed through corridors, breathed the smell of paper and hopelessness; then I was pushed into a

room and questioned by another official. This one was in uniform.

'You were picked up on the street without identification papers. You are fined two thousand gulden. I will make out your receipt immediately.'

'I beg your pardon,' I faltered. 'I haven't that much money on me. Couldn't you lock me up for a while instead?'

He laughed aloud.

'Lock you up? My dear fellow, what an idea! Do you expect us to feed you in the bargain? – No, my friend, if you can't pay the trifling fine, I shall have to impose our heaviest penalty, temporary withdrawal of your existence permit! Kindly hand me your existence card!'

I had none.

The official was speechless. He called in two associates; they conferred in whispers, repeatedly motioning in my direction and looking at me with horror and amazement. Then my official had me led away to a detention room, pending deliberations on my case.

There several persons were sitting or standing about; a soldier stood guard at the door. I noticed that apart from my lack of shoes I was by far the best-dressed of the lot. The others treated me with a certain respect and made a seat free for me. A timid little man sidled up to me, bent down, and whispered in my ear: 'I've got a magnificent bargain for you. I have a sugar beet at home. A whole sugar beet in perfect condition. It weighs almost seven pounds. Yours for the asking. What do you offer?'

He moved his ear close to my mouth, and I whispered: 'You make me an offer. How much do you want?'

He whispered softly back: 'Let's say a hundred and fifty gulden!'

I shook my head and looked away. Soon I was deep in thought.

I saw that I had been absent too long, it would be hard for me to adapt. I'd have given a good deal for a pair of shoes or stockings, my bare feet were miserably cold from the wet street. But everyone else in the room was barefoot too.

After a few hours they came for me. I was taken to Office 285, Room 19f. This time the policeman stayed with me. He stationed himself between me and the official, a very high official, it seemed to me.

'You've put yourself in a very nasty position,' he began. 'You have been living in this city without an existence permit. You are aware no doubt that the heaviest penalties are in order.'

I made a slight bow.

'If you please,' I said, 'I have only one request. I realise that I am quite unequal to the situation and that my position can only get worse and worse. – Couldn't you condemn me to death? I should be very grateful!'

The official looked gently into my eyes.

'I understand,' he said amiably. 'But anybody could come asking for that! In any case, you'd need a demise card. Can you afford one? They cost four thousand gulden.'

'No, I haven't got that much money. But I'd give all I have. I have an enormous desire to die.'

He smiled strangely.

'I can believe that, you're not the only one. But dying isn't so simple. You belong to the state, my dear man, you are

obligated to the state, body and soul. You must know that. But by the way – I see you're registered under the name of Sinclair, Emil. Could you be Sinclair, the writer?

'That's me!'

'Oh, I'm so glad. Maybe I can do something for you. Officer, you may leave.'

The policeman left the room, the official shook my hand.

'I've read your books with great interest,' he said in a friendly tone, 'and I'll do my best to help you. – But, good God, how did you get into this incredible situation?'

'Well, you see, I was away for a while. Two or three years ago I took refuge in the cosmic, and frankly I had rather supposed the war would be over by the time I got back. – But tell me, can you get me a demise card? I'd be ever so grateful.'

'It may be possible. But first you'll need an existence permit. Obviously nothing can be done without that. I'll give you a note to Office 127. On my recommendation they'll issue you a temporary existence card. But it will only be valid for two days.'

'Oh, that will be more than enough!'

'Very well! When you have it, come back here to me.'

We shook hands.

'One more thing,' I said softly. 'May I ask you a question? You must realise how little I know about what's been going on.'

'Go right ahead.'

'Well, here's what I'd like to know: how can life go on under these conditions? How can people stand it?'

'Oh, they're not so badly off. Your situation is exceptional: a civilian – and without papers! There are very few civilians left. Practically everyone who isn't a soldier is a civil servant.'

That makes life bearable for most people, a good many are genuinely happy. Little by little one gets used to the shortages. When the potatoes gave out, we had to put up with sawdust gruel – they season it with tar now, it's surprisingly tasty – we all thought it would be unbearable. But then we got used to it. And the same with everything else.'

'I see,' I said. 'It's really not so surprising. But there's one thing I still don't understand. Tell me: why is the whole world making these enormous efforts? Putting up with such hardships, with all these laws, these thousands of bureaus and bureaucrats – what is all this meant to preserve and safeguard?'

The gentleman looked at me in amazement.

'What a question!' he cried, shaking his head. 'You know we're at war: the whole world is at war. That's what we are preserving, what we make laws and endure hardships for. The war! Without these enormous exertions and achievements our armies wouldn't be able to fight for a week. They'd starve – we can't allow that!'

'Yes,' I said slowly, 'you've got something there! The war, in other words, is a treasure that must be preserved at any cost. Yes, but – I know it's an odd question – why do you value the war so highly? Is it worth so much? Is war really a treasure?'

The official shrugged his shoulders and gave me a pitying look. He saw that I just didn't understand.

'My dear Herr Sinclair,' he said. 'You've lost contact with the world. Go out into the street, talk to people; then make a slight mental effort and ask yourself: What have we got left? What is the substance of our lives? Only one answer is possible: The war is all we have left! Pleasure and personal profit, social

ambition, greed, love, cultural activity – all that has gone out of existence. If there is still any law, order, or thought in the world, we have the war to thank for it. – Now do you understand?

Yes, now I understood, and I thanked the gentleman kindly.

I left him and mechanically pocketed the recommendation to Office 127. I had no intention of using it, I had no desire to molest the gentlemen in those offices any further. Before anyone could notice me and stop me, I inwardly recited the short astral spell, turned off my heartbeat, and made my body vanish under a clump of bushes. I pursued my cosmic wanderings and abandoned the idea of going home.